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ABSTRACT

The undergraduate organizational communication series at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has been designed to develop competency through knowledge, skills, sensitivity, and values. The four courses in the series--Introduction to Organizational Communication, Business and Professional Communication, Advanced Organizational Communication, and Communication Internship--permit appropriate repetition and reinforcement, and through cooperative efforts among faculty members, allow instructors to make specific decisions about the balance and type of learning experiences that will most benefit students. The decisions made about the knowledge to be presented and the skills to be developed are obvious attempts to influence the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Less obvious, but equally important, are the attempts to develop sensitivity and ethical perspectives to positively influence the affective domain. The series is based on the assumption that the educational influence in the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains contributes to communication competency and to increased behaviorial choices--the application of learning--in the organizational setting. (FL)

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IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SERIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a four-course undergraduate organizational communication series developed at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and the communication competencies which the series is designed to cultivate. Based on the Littlejohn and Jabusch conception of components of communication competency and the McCroskey discussion of the domains of learning for communication education, the series (Introduction to Organizational Communication, Business and Professional Communication, Advanced Organizational Communication, and Communication Internship) is described by using the conceptual categories of communication competency--knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values--for developing educational experiences which influence the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning. It is the assumption of this paper that the educational influence in these domains contributes to communication competency and to increased behavioral choices--the application of learning--in the organizational setting.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SERIES

INTRODUCTION

Recently the American public has been alerted to the fact that organizational communication may well be the key to our national economic success in the eighties. We are described by John Naisbitt in Megatrends as no longer an industrial society, but instead an information society.[1] He describes the vertical to horizontal power shift, the transition from hierarchies to networks based on and in rich communication within America's corporations. Peters and Waterman, in their recent bestseller, In Search of Excellence, identify intense, informal communication as a key to corporate excellence in America.[2]

With all this emphasis on organizational communication, how should educators respond? Is it possible to prepare students for jobs in the corporation of the eighties, and if so how? What kinds of communication competencies is the corporate world seeking? And even more basic, how do we begin defining what organizational communication competency is?

This paper describes the undergraduate organizational communication series developed at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and the competencies which the series is designed to cultivate. We do not pretend that this series either identifies or develops all of the communication competencies relevant to organizational life in the eighties or beyond. We do believe, however, that the series proposes some initial answers to the challenges educators face in an emerging information society.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Communication competence has been a major topic in recent communication literature. The definition we prefer is that of Littlejohn and Jabusch: "the ability and willingness of an individual to participate responsibly in a transaction in such a way as to maximize the outcome of shared meaning."[3] This definition pertains to both sending and receiving--initiating and consuming--since competency is inevitably a two-sided coin.

Littlejohn and Jabusch identify four components of communication competency--process understanding, interpersonal sensitivity, communication skills, and ethical responsibility. Process understanding relates to "the cognitive ability to comprehend the elements and dynamics of a communication event."[4] It results in participants' reflection on their own communicative behavior, which in turn can maximize their understanding of communication choices and affect behavioral flexibility.

A second component of communication competence in Littlejohn and Jabusch's scheme is interpersonal sensitivity. Closely allied with rhetorical sensitivity, this component of competence corresponds with such characteristics as empathic ability, social relaxation, and appropriate response selection.

Communication skills, the third component discussed by Littlejohn and Jabusch, involves the ability to use a conceptual or physical set of verbal and nonverbal operations to achieve a particular objective. And finally, communication competence includes an ethical component involving an attitude of concern for the well-being of other participants besides oneself, a concern for a positive outcome for all.

Considering all four components, and applying them to the organizational communicator, competence develops from an increased understanding of the

communication process; an ability to accurately sense the meanings and feelings of oneself and others in the organization; improved skills in such areas as speaking, writing, listening, and reading; and finally, a well-defined sense of, in this case, business as well as interpersonal ethics.

If this is the stuff competency is made of, how then does one become competent? According to Littlejohn and Jabusch, communication competency arises out of the interaction of theory, practice, and analysis. While most of us fail to think beyond the first two of these components, they are most definitely not enough. Imagining the worst, we all know that theories can become outdated and therefore relatively useless, and furthermore, it is possible to practice inferior techniques and thereby actually reinforce poor communication. Even when we do not fall into these traps, Littlejohn and Jabusch contend that the real key to communication competence is through the cognitive activity of analysis, critical thinking based in both theory and practice. Developing competence involves the constant interaction of all three components--theory, practice, and analysis--through an emphasis on knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values.

McCroskey, in a discussion of communication competence and performance, suggests that, . . . "The goal of instruction in communication, . . . is to enable the learner to be more effective in her/his communicative encounters in the future than in the past."[5] He summarizes scholars in the field of learning who have identified domains of learning: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective, which influence behavioral choice. The cognitive domain in this scheme relates to both knowledge and understanding ranging from specific facts to complex analysis. The psychomotor domain can be equated with behavioral skills, both individual and technical, while the affective domain describes the emotional component--attitudes and feelings--which

relate to the other two domains.

We see McCroskey's discussion of the domains of learning for communication education and Littlejohn and Jabusch's conception of components of communication competency as complimentary frameworks from which to develop a curriculum in organizational communication. The four components of communication competency--knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values--provide useful conceptual categories for developing educational experiences which influence the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. It is the assumption of this paper that the educational influence in these domains contributes to communication competency and to increased behavioral choices--the application of learning--in the organizational setting.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SERIES

Our focus on organizational communication competency during the development of the undergraduate organizational communication series at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs prompted us to solicit input from business professionals in the community. To do this, we designed a questionnaire investigating the importance of the components of organizational communication competency--knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values. In each of the four components of competence, we identified curriculum items, and survey participants were asked to circle 1, 2, or 3 if the item was Very Important; 4, 5, 6, or 7 if the item was Somewhat Important; or 8, 9, or 10 if the item was Not Very Important in their organizations. Surveys were mailed to 79 persons in 52 organizations, including Hewlett-Packard Company; Innos Corporation; Colorado Interstate Gas Company; Honeywell, Inc.; Texas Instruments Corporation; Digital Electronics, Inc.; Ford Aerospace and Communications Corporation; TRW Colorado Electronics, Inc.; local banks; major hotels;

television stations; life insurance companies; and nonprofit organizations. A total of 44 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 56%.

Tables 1-4 report the number of survey respondents rating each curriculum item as Very Important, Somewhat Important, and Not Very Important. Mean ratings also are reported for each curriculum item and were determined by multiplying the number of responses for each rank by the rank, summing the products, and dividing by responses per item.[6]

TABLE 1

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF CURRICULUM ITEMS

Competency Component: Knowledge	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
1. Business writing: principles of clarity, style and organization	35	9	-	2.2?
2. Interviewing: principles and research findings	23	18	2	3.95
3. Small group decision-making processes	26	18	-	3.45
4. Leadership styles and techniques for managers	28	16	-	3.00
5. Presentations: technical, audio-visual, persuasive	26	17	2	3.54
6. Principles of nonverbal communication (body language)	13	19	8	4.90
7. Computer trends in business	21	22	1	3.84
8. Learning an organization's philosophy, formal and informal communication networks, and OJT as a student intern	26	16	2	3.36

TABLE 1 - continued

Competency Component: Knowledge	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
9. Techniques for diagnosing organizational communication problems	28	14	2	3.25
10. Learning about typical communication problems in organizational communication styles	25	17	2	3.70

TABLE 2

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF CURRICULUM ITEMS

Competency Component: Sensitivity	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
11. Learning to accept criticism and praise as a student intern	28	14	1	3.16
12. Learning to accept responsibility for individual communication behavior	37	7	0	2.20
13. Building superior-subordinate and peer relationships	36	8	0	2.52
14. Managing conflict	36	7	0	2.30
15. Understanding how interpersonal communication and organizational communication may differ	34	6	2	2.93
16. Conducting performance appraisals, and grievance and counseling interviews	28	14	2	3.34
17. Problems in social communication on the job; competition, conspiracy, gossip, and rumor	22	21	1	3.93
18. Displaying self-motivation and independence as an intern during times of organizational stress	28	15	1	2.88

TABLE 3

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF CURRICULUM ITEMS

Competency Component: Skills	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
19. Business writing: letters, memos, reports, resumes, editing and rewriting	34	8	1	2.39
20. Reading for speed and accuracy	22	20	1	3.67
21. Listening	39	3	0	1.64
22. Selection and information gathering interview techniques	30	13	0	2.93
23. Planning and conducting meetings	24	15	5	3.61
24. Delivering technical, audio-visual, persuasive presentations	24	15	4	3.44
25. Telephone communication	31	10	1	2.93
26. Skill testing and improvement as a student intern	11	24	4	4.90
27. Designing and analyzing communication programs (e.g., audits, workshops)	9	26	6	5.15

TABLE 4

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF CURRICULUM ITEMS

Competency Component: Values	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
28. Business ethics (e.g., ghost writing, stress and burnout, moving up the organizational ladder, etc.)	29	12	0	2.70

TABLE 4 - continued

Competency Component: Values	Number of Respondents Per Category			Mean Ratings
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	
29. Interpersonal ethics (e.g., machiavellianism and manipulation, social-business overlap, etc.)	30	11	1	2.78
30. Corporate excellence in America	23	18	1	3.33
31. Exhibiting (and testing) learned values as a student intern	19	17	4	3.98

Based on mean ratings within a $\tilde{x}$= 1.00-3.00 range, respondents identified 13 of the curriculum items as Very Important with the remaining 18 items falling within the Somewhat Important ($\tilde{x}$= 3.01-7.00) range. No item was identified as Not Very Important ($\tilde{x}$= 7.01-10.00). Means by items ranged from listening skills ($\tilde{x}$= 1.64) to designing and analyzing communication programs ($\tilde{x}$ = 5.15).

THE UNDERGRADUATE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SERIES

In 1976, Pace and Feingold surveyed the Organizational Communication Division of the International Communication Association and used survey results to create a "model" curriculum in organizational communication.[7]

Freshman Level

Introduction to Organizational Communication

Sophomore Level

Business and Professional Speaking

Communication Theory

Junior Level

Conference Techniques/Group

Discussion

Senior Level (Dual Level)

Communication Behavior in Organizations

Theory of Organizational Communication

Communication Audit

Using this "model" as a model, as well as the input solicited from local business professionals, we designed an undergraduate organizational communication emphasis at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. At the core of the emphasis area is a four-course series: Introduction to Organizational Communication, Business and Professional Communication, Advanced Organizational Communication, and Communication Internship. In addition, students pursuing the organizational communication speciality are required to expand beyond core requirements by taking related coursework within cooperating schools and colleges in the University. Coursework includes titles such as Business Information and the Computer, Business Statistics, Introduction to Management and Organizations, and Managing Individuals and Work Groups. Other required communication coursework relating to the organizational communication speciality includes Interpersonal Communication, Principles of Communication, Public Speaking, Group Discussion, and Persuasion. The communication internship requirement is fulfilled at host organizations such as Hewlett-Packard, Digital Electronics, or Current, Inc. Required courses in the curriculum are as follows.

Freshman Year

Interpersonal Communication

Principles of Communication

Sophomore Year

Introduction to Organizational Communication

Public Speaking

Business Information and the Computer

Business Statistics

Junior Year

Group Discussion

Introduction to Management and Organization

Business and Professional Communication

Managing Individuals and Work Groups

Senior Year

Advanced Organizational Communication

Rhetorical Dimensions in Communication

Persuasion

Managing Complex Organizations

Communication Internship

THE COMPONENTS OF COMPETENCY

Knowledge

The three classroom courses in the series promote knowledge by focusing on theories of human communication and how communication processes operate in organizational settings. We present models of communication such as the one-way, interaction, two-person, and systems models to illustrate the gathering, processing, storing and disseminating of communication within organizations.[8] Along with discussions of organizational communication as organizational culture, we use a structural-functional analysis framework to examine communication implications of major organizational theories.[9] Students are also introduced to theories of interpersonal relationships within organizations, leadership and small group communication, nonverbal communication, business writing, effective reading and listening, and new information technologies.

Sensitivity

We attempt to cultivate interpersonal sensitivity in our undergraduate organizational communication series by focusing on such topics as conflict management, superior-subordinate and peer relationships, management attitudes, and communicator styles. The emphasis is on developing interpersonal sensitivity by analyzing the impact of personal behaviors in organizational settings.

Skills

The three classroom courses and the internship experience provide opportunities for students to develop both initiating and consuming communication skills. Specifically, students prepare written reports and deliver oral presentations, participate in small group decision-making, practice interviewing techniques, and take part in a communication data gathering experience.

Values

Admittedly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to "teach" students values; nevertheless, we believe that important groundwork is laid in our series for making ethical decisions. With an emphasis on responsibility and respect in all types of communication transactions, and discussions and observations of ethical dilemmas in organizational settings, students are encouraged to think, question, and evaluate.

THE FOUR-COURSE SERIES

In our undergraduate communication series, knowledge is pursued through reading, lecture, discussion, guest communication professionals from corporations in Colorado Springs, and the preparation of written reports and oral presentations. Sensitivity is sought through simulations, case

studies, and discussion; skills through role play, videotaping, simulations and experiential exercises, and critiques; and values through, again, case studies, discussion, observations, and experience.

The first course in the organizational communication series, Introduction to Organizational Communication, emphasizes theory and practice with limited analysis opportunities. Course content deals with models of human communication and introduces students to definitions of organizational communication. Both definitions and models of organizational communication are presented from communication research and students work with practicing organizational professionals to determine operating definitions within organizational contexts. The course illustrates communication processes (gathering, processing, storing, and disseminating of information) and presents basics of information flow and distortion. In conjunction with increasing organizational interest in productive teams (i.e., the quality circle movement), students are introduced to individual communication roles and responsibilities with special emphasis on group participation for problem-solving and decision-making.[10] Class assignments are structured for students to experience both participation and leadership roles in groups. The final segment of the course deals with the various roles of communication professionals within organizations. Use is made of local professionals (principally from host intern organizations) and representatives from the Schools of Business and Engineering. Students practice interviewing techniques with these professionals to develop reports which include not only basic job responsibilities but also academic preparation and an assessment of preparation needs for those pursuing particular career specialities.

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION - COMMUNICATION 224

Knowledge	Sensitivity
Models of Human Communication Definitions of Organizational Communication Communication Processes in Organizations Individual Communication Roles in Organizations Group Processes in Organizations Flow of Information Distortion in Organizational Communication	Interpersonal Relationships Problems in Group Process Individual Communication Responsibilities Interpersonal versus Organizational Communication Problems Interactional Nature of Human Communication
Skills	**Values**
Interviewing Techniques Participation in Small Group Processes Leadership in Group Settings Oral and Written Presentations	Ethical Perspectives for Human Communication Individual Value Assessment Importance of Effective Communication Processes for Organizational Ethics

The second year organizational communication course, Business and Professional Communication, emphasizes theory, practice, and analysis. It is divided into four modules--the written word, the spoken word, the unspoken word, and the electronic word--primarily focusing on corporate communication skills. Based on the results of recent survey resea[illegible] Fortune 500 executives, for example, as well as that done by comm[illegible]ation scholars, the course begins with ten hours of concentrated instruction in business writing.[11] While communication educators sometimes fear to tred on English composition territory, the pervasiveness of poor writing skills suggests that we must join forces rather then divide along academic specialities. Certainly writing skills fall within the broader range of critical communication skills without which students cannot succeed. And following Business and Professional Communication, students are urged to take an entire semester of business and technical writing from the English Department to further hone their writing skills. Other content areas in the second year course include: presentational speaking, interviewing, group process, personal communication in organizations, nonverbal communication, effective reading and listening techniques, and organizational communication trends for the future through the use of computers, word processing, and other electronic media.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION - COMMUNICATION 324

Knowledge	Sensitivity
Business Writing: Principles of Clarity, Style and Organization Interviewing: Strategies and Questions Small Group Decision-Making Process Parliamentary Procedure The Manager As Leader Public Communication: Content and Form Nonverbal Communication Components and Strategies Trends in Organizational Communication: Computers, Word Processing, etc.	Superior-Subordinate and Peer Relationship Building Interpersonal Conflict Management Performance Appraisals Grievance and Counseling Interviews Problems in Social Communication on the Job: Competition, Conspiracy, Gossip and Rumor, etc. Interpersonal Sensitivity in Writing
Skills	**Values**
Business Writing: Letters, Memos, Resumes, Reports, Editing, and Rewriting Effective Reading: Speed, Accuracy, Techniques for Reading Aloud, Listening Selection and Information Gathering Interview Techniques (Interviewer and Interviewee) Planning and Conducting Meetings Public Communication; Delivery Using Visual Aids with Facility, Impromptu Speaking, Responding to Audience Questions Telephone Communication	Ethical Perspectives Business Ethics: Ghostwriting, Organizational Absorption vs. "Creative Independence"[12], Stress and Burnout, Moving Up the Organizational Ladder, Advertising Interpersonal Ethics, Machiavellianism, Social-Business Overlap Corporate Excellence in America

The third course in the series, Advanced Organizational Communication, again emphasizes theory, practice, and analysis with particular attention to development of analysis and diagnostic capabilities. The course presents models of organizational communication as they can be used for analysis. Using systems theory and structural-functionalism as guides, major organizational theories are studied with respect to their communication implications. Additionally, students apply theoretical frameworks to a series of case studies designed to represent various types of organizational circumstances and problems. Course segments presenting intervention theory, conflict management techniques, and principles of communication auditing are seen as particularly important opportunities to integrate theory, practice and analysis. Finally, a section of the advanced course is devoted to the subject of organizational culture and communication with special emphasis given to organizational ethics and values.

ADVANCED ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION - COMMUNICATION 424

Knowledge	Sensitivity
Models of Organizational Communication	Organizational Communication Climate
Systems Theory and Structural-Functionalism	Individual Responsibility for Communication in the Organizational System
Communication Implications of Major Organizational Theories	Culture as an Influence on Communication
Concepts of Organizational Culture and Communication	Role of Productive/Destructive Conflict Processes
Intervention Theories	Responsibilities in Change and Intervention
Conflict Management Techniques	
Communication Auditing	

Skills	Values
Diagnostic Techniques	Organizational Culture As It Reflects the Value System of Organizations
Auditing Procedures	Ethical Dilemmas in Organizational Communication
Oral Presentations: Case Studies, Intervention Settings	Perspectives For Conflict Resolution
Conflict Management Techniques Confrontation Meetings, P.A.	Interpersonal Ethics
Group Leadership and Participation	Ethics of Intervention
Writing: Analysis Reports; Recommendations for Communication Systems	Importance of Effective Communication Processes for Organizational Ethics
Interviewing (Performance Appraisals, etc.)	

The culminating course in our undergraduate organizational communication series is an internship at a Colorado Springs corporation such as Hewlett-Packard, Digital Electronics, or Current, Inc. Here, working alongside communication professionals in training and development, personnel, or internal communication, for example, students synthesize, test, and expand what they have learned in the classroom. Through analysis and practice, and with previous exposure to organizational theories, students discover their communication competencies--strengths as well as areas requiring improvement--in real-life, nonthreatening situations. (Noone has yet been "fired" from an internship.)

COMMUNICATION INTERNSHIP - COMMUNICATION 469

Knowledge	Sensitivity
Organizational Philosophy Communication Networks and Chain of Command Informal Communication Channels Job Requirements and Performance Standards	Learning to Accept Criticism and Praise Learning Appropriate Disclosure Levels Building Intern-Supervisor Relationship Displaying Self-Motivation and Independence, Particularly During Times of Organizational Stress
Skills	**Values**
Writing Discussion Speaking Selection and Information Gathering Interviews Telephone Communication Techniques Listening Following Instructions	Exhibiting (and Testing) Learned Values

CONCLUSION

The undergraduate organizational communication series at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has been designed to develop competency through knowledge, skills, sensitivity, and values. We believe that the series concept permits appropriate repetition and reinforcement, and through cooperative efforts among faculty, it allows us to make specific decisions about the balance and type of learning experiences that will most benefit our students. The decisions we make about the knowledge to be presented and the skills to be developed are obvious attempts to influence the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Less obvious but equally important are the attempts to develop sensitivity and ethical perspectives to positively influence the affective domain. An even more basic influence on the affective domain is the series itself, for we believe that the development of knowledge, sensitivity, skills, and values over time has greater potential for positive affect than any singular course offering no matter how well developed.

If the discipline of communication is to be recognized for its contribution to excellence in an information society, we must design courses in which both the tangibles and the intangibles of that excellence can be explored. If as Naisbitt and Peters and Waterman contend, communication is a key to our future economic success, then educators must continually define which competencies are important and how best to develop them. The undergraduate organizational communication series at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is offered not as an answer, but as an approach that attempts to encompass the richness of our discipline, basics of the learning process, and communication issues for tomorrow's needs.

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